

1 SENATE JOINT MEMORIAL 64

2 **48TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2007**

3 INTRODUCED BY

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10 A JOINT MEMORIAL

11 RECOGNIZING THE HEALTH RISKS OF URANIUM MINING AND PROCESSING  
12 IN NATIVE AMERICAN AND NON-NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES;  
13 REQUESTING A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACTS OF PAST  
14 URANIUM MINING AND PROCESSING ACTIVITIES IN NEW MEXICO;  
15 RECOMMENDING A SUSPENSION OF ALL PERMITTING AND LICENSING OF  
16 URANIUM MINING AND PROCESSING ACTIVITIES IN NEW MEXICO PENDING  
17 THE COMPLETION OF THAT ASSESSMENT.

18  
19 WHEREAS, the uranium mining industry and the federal  
20 government in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s failed to  
21 advise uranium miners and their families of the health risks  
22 associated with uranium mining and processing; and

23 WHEREAS, Native American uranium miners in particular  
24 were not provided protective clothing or respirators; the  
25 uranium mines in which they worked were not ventilated or were

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1 poorly ventilated; and uranium mine and mill wastes were used  
2 for housing construction by Native American families who were  
3 unaware of the health risks of using such construction  
4 materials; and

5 WHEREAS, beginning in the early 1950s, the United States  
6 public health service conducted studies that revealed  
7 respiratory illnesses such as lung cancer, silicosis,  
8 tuberculosis, pneumonia and emphysema were causing high rates  
9 of death among underground uranium miners; and

10 WHEREAS, by 1959 public health service studies of uranium  
11 miners revealed there was a statistically significant  
12 association between uranium mining and lung cancer; and

13 WHEREAS, Navajo, Acoma and Laguna uranium miners, widows  
14 and family members testified in congressional hearings in the  
15 1970s about the hardships their families suffered from the  
16 illnesses and premature deaths associated with the miners' work  
17 in the uranium mines and mills in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado  
18 and Utah; and

19 WHEREAS, hundreds of abandoned, unreclaimed uranium mines  
20 still exist in communities in northwestern New Mexico, and  
21 scores of Native American and non-Native American families  
22 still live in close proximity to those mines; and

23 WHEREAS, state and federal studies have repeatedly shown  
24 that surface water, ground water and soils were and remain  
25 irreversibly contaminated by past uranium mining and milling

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1 activities, and that livestock that grazed in the mining areas  
2 were found to have hazardous levels of radioactive materials in  
3 their edible organs and muscle; and

4 WHEREAS, no comprehensive studies of the public health  
5 impacts of past mining and processing and the continuing  
6 environmental impacts of abandoned mines have been conducted in  
7 New Mexico's uranium mining districts; and

8 WHEREAS, more than a dozen companies have applied for  
9 permits or licenses to explore for uranium and to construct new  
10 mining and milling facilities on hundreds of thousands of acres  
11 in northwestern New Mexico without agreeing to assist the state  
12 or Indian tribes in remediating the environmental impacts of  
13 past uranium mining activities; and

14 WHEREAS, at least thirteen Navajo Nation chapters, along  
15 with major Navajo institutions, including the Navajo Nation  
16 council, as well as the Pueblo of Acoma and the all Indian  
17 pueblo council, have adopted resolutions opposing efforts of  
18 the uranium mining industry to resume uranium mining and  
19 milling operations in and near the Navajo Nation and the Pueblo  
20 of Acoma cultural province; and

21 WHEREAS, such proposed new uranium mining activities may  
22 adversely affect the land, water, air and cultural resources of  
23 the Navajo Nation and the New Mexico pueblos, including Mount  
24 Taylor, which is a sacred site for the Navajo Nation and the  
25 Pueblo of Acoma;

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1           NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE  
2 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the state of New Mexico and its  
3 governmental agencies and political subdivisions recognize the  
4 ongoing public health risks of past and future uranium mining  
5 and processing activities in and near the Navajo Nation, the  
6 Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna and communities throughout the  
7 Grants mineral belt; and

8           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of health, in  
9 collaboration with the department of environment and the mining  
10 and minerals division of the energy, minerals and natural  
11 resources department, and with appropriate agencies of the  
12 Navajo Nation and the Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna, be requested  
13 to compile and report on an assessment of existing  
14 uranium-mining-contaminated areas within New Mexico, including  
15 all areas in Indian country, and to make recommendations for  
16 environmental restoration, public health studies and other  
17 measures needed to address the legacy of past uranium mining  
18 and processing; and

19           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of health  
20 present its report to the governor and to the appropriate  
21 interim legislative committees by October 30, 2007 and make its  
22 report available to the public in both hard copy and electronic  
23 form; and

24           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all local, state, federal and  
25 tribal agencies be requested to refrain from issuing any

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1 permits or licenses for uranium exploration, mining and  
2 processing until completion and submission of the report by the  
3 department of health to the governor and appropriate interim  
4 legislative committees; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be  
6 transmitted to the governor, the secretary of health, the  
7 secretary of energy, minerals and natural resources, the  
8 secretary of environment, the office of the attorney general,  
9 the president of the Navajo Nation, the speaker of the Navajo  
10 Nation council, the attorney general of the Navajo Nation,  
11 members of the Navajo Nation council resources committee, the  
12 governors of the Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna, the chair of the  
13 federal nuclear regulatory commission, the administrator of the  
14 federal environmental protection agency, the chief of the  
15 federal department of agriculture, the acting director of the  
16 bureau of land management of the federal department of the  
17 interior, the federal assistant secretary for Indian affairs  
18 and members of New Mexico's congressional delegation.